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The Death of Mr. Webster:

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN

HOLLIS-STREET MEETING-HOUSE,

ON SUNDAY, OCT. 31, 1852.

BY THOMAS STARR KING,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

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SERMON.

DANIEL vi. 3: — "THEN THIS DANIEL WAS PREFERRED ABOVE THE PRESIDENTS AND PRINCES, BECAUSE AN EXCELLENT SPIRIT WAS IN HIM; AND THE KING THOUGHT TO SET HIM OVER THE WHOLE REALM."

THERE is but one subject that can engage our thoughts in the church to-day. A great sorrow saturates the air. The solemn sense of irreparable loss weighs down the spirits of the American people. Out from the heart of the land has burst a grief, of which the official symbols — the sobbing of cannon, the mourning drapery, the lowered flags, the public resolutions — are, for once, the honest and feeble signs. The whole feeling of the nation, like a conscious weeping willow, arches its vast respect, and droops its sensitive foliage over one new-made grave.

The words I have selected from the Old Testament are perfectly applicable as an expression of the greatness which has recently been stricken from the living forces of our country. He was preferred above all presidents and princes. The highest office would have been nothing but the proper pedestal, to set the proportions of his greatness in their appropriate position and relief. The largest honors would have been only the natural drapery of his broad shoulders. If all the great men of this generation could have been collected from all nations, it is probable that no one would have been found to deserve the preeminent place for massiveness and majesty of mind, and to stand forth, by honorable election, as "the foremost man of all this world," so much as he whose mortal life has recently been quenched.

But, however this may be, it cannot be questioned that the crown of our national genius has been snatched away by death. By common consent of the most eminent in our land, — the orators, the lawyers, the states-

men, — he was their leader, whose supremacy they cheerfully allowed. His brow was, for more than a generation, a prominent part of our natural scenery. His was the great granite face, like that on the Franconia Mountain in New Hampshire, standing out from the solid ridges of our New England intellect and character, and overlooking the land. Him and the great cataract of the lakes, we boasted of to other states as the chief glories of our country. It would have been grand, if, in the fulness of his vigor, and before any controversies of his political honor arose, he could have stood in the most eminent place of our country, — the magnificent entablature, dignifying and completing the various columns of its genius. He did not have this proper setting for his powers; but he did stand highest by his native sublimity. In the regard of those whose opinion is lasting fame, in the respect of foreign eyes, he stood, as he will stand in history, preferred, for mental greatness, above all the presidents and princes that were more distinguished by office.

"Pygmies are pygmies still, though perched on Alps;
And pyramids are pyramids in vales."

How can it be otherwise than that the sudden disappearance of this colossal greatness from the moral landscape of the world should shock all hearts with emotions that affect the lowest strata of our sensibility! If the tidings had been borne to us that some of the permanent wonders of nature had been obliterated, that an earthquake had shaken down the great range of the Himalayas, or ingulfed the majesty of Mont Blanc in its black bosom, or had levelled the rock over which Niagara has roared for ages, our minds could not have been so startled with a feeling of the mysterious power that envelopes us, as now that we learn —

"This mighty spirit is eclipsed; this power
Hath passed from day to darkness; to whose hour
Of light no likeness is bequeathed, no name, —
Focus at once of all the rays of fame!"

What visitation of Providence can thrill the citizens of our country, especially of New England, with more solemn thoughts than to know that the majestic presence — "how

noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!" — is never more to be seen of men; that the greatest nature our land has reared since Washington was born is never more to guide our councils and ennoble our Capitol; that the book of his activity is sealed; and that he is now to be a treasure of memory, a silent grandeur, in the quiet halls of history, — a force and an ornament belonging to the past?

This is not the place, of course, for any eulogy, or even an analysis of the powers, of the departed statesman. That which would be extravagance if said of most great men is the simple statement of his intellectual power. And yet, in speaking of his genius, we should be careful not to weaken our eulogium by doing injustice to the breadth of the field of genius. There are kinds of greatness of which his mental constitution did not largely partake. To the rank of explorers and discoverers, — men who anticipate history and

hasten destiny, and who stand far ahead of the vanguard of humanity, holding up the flame of a new truth, which their intellectual fire had kindled, that flashes light into the unexplored pathway of the future, — he did not belong. He was made to be an institutionalist, rather than a prophet. His mission was to comprehend, purify, conserve, and strengthen the good structures which society has already gained, to widen and confirm their possible blessings for the race, rather than to meditate a new order, even though it might be a higher one, which could be reached only by disruption of established ties, and through the turmoil of revolution. The natural attitude of his mind was reverence for the beneficent truth and institutions which the past bequeathed. He was the profound interpreter of the practical wisdom embodied in political systems, and the potent defender of it against the misapprehension of ignorance, the perversion of party interests, and the hand of heedless innovation. He estimated the positive social good which rooted institutions disburse, even though many

evils were incidental to them, of really more account than the ghastly theories of perfect good, which beckon away so many flighty and adventurous intellects from the solid road of slow and steady progress.

He had the combination of powers, temper, and discipline, that make a safe and successful administrative statesman ; and his intellect was just the ally which our system of government most needed, at the time when he entered public life, to set forth its wisdom, to unfold the beautiful symmetry of its structure and powers, and to hold it up to the admiration and gratitude of the country, that the affections of the people might fasten upon it, like the tendrils of the ivy upon the solid castle-wall.

The whole structure of our Constitution ; the grandeur and marvel of its combinations, as relieved against the miserable patchwork of the old confederation ; its originality among the political edifices of history ; the skill with which its forces are balanced, and the ease of their working, — were comprehended in his intellect as the mind of a mechanic compre-

hends the idea of a machine which his genius has invented. He was the epic poet of the Convention of 1787. His sympathies were less with the Revolution than with the builders and the erection of our present national polity. Our whole governmental America; the bands that connect the State forces with the vivifying power of the central administration; the complex harmony of judiciary and executive, military and legislative powers; the ligaments that could sustain the greatest strain, and the delicate tendons where it needed the most tender handling and the most permanent safeguards; the safe vents supplied in it for popular passion, and the cylinders that must constantly condense the force of unrelenting law, — all played in his brain as a vital and complicated conception, whose magnificence he revered, and whose beauty was the constant inspiration of his heart. The work of the great Convention that framed our government seems nobler as reflected in his capacious understanding, and as its ideal rods and beams and valves worked without friction

in the bright medium of his imagination, than it probably seemed to the hot intellects of those who had just completed their task, and left it outlined on immortal parchment.

The idea of the Union, which to many minds is an abstraction, and too often is the customary expletive of a demagogue's vile morality and feeble thought, was with him the vivid and adequate symbol of the greatness and the privileges, the power and the peace, of the republic. It seemed as though his eye always took in the moral and civil scenery of the country, — its thousands of happy homes, its schools and churches, its factories and workshops, the vast fleets of its commerce, and the widening line of civilization, before which the wilderness was falling; and then, when he spoke, made the word *Union* embody all the gladness and grandeur which so much prosperity and plenty, so much order and happiness, awakened in his breast. For this reason it was, we must believe, that he called on his countrymen to cherish the sentiments that should make that word sacred. For this

reason he used continually the awful imagery of the breaking up of constellations, and of anarchy in the firmament, to state the terrors and the woes that would attend an explosion of the forces that bind our states together. His intellect appreciated the wisdom of their combination, and felt, too, the delicacy of their poise. Not that he was indifferent to the evils which are covered and partially maintained by our great national bond; but he would not look at the evils exclusively or minutely. He saw an immense overbalance of good, — benefits more various, more substantial, and more precious, than any polity on earth had ever secured to men. These the word Union represented; these, to his mind, the blotting of that word annihilated, and in their place introduced discord, contention, and bloody strife.

Add to this, that the great future of America (if explosive passions could only be kept down) charmed his imagination. He comprehended what the country would be, centuries hence. In swelling speech he bade future generations

hail; and there were times when he seemed to see the upturned faces of the Saxon millions yet to come, beseeching him, by their looks and by their prayers, to pledge all the resources of his intellect and his influence to preserve the unity and peace of a nation, upon which their fortunes and their happiness were cast. It may be a sign of the secondary grade of his genius, that the idea of right, in its abstract holiness and majesty, did not burn constantly before him. But no abstract principle or sentiment withdrew him from a careful measure of the good which an actual system would secure to men in the long run. He was not led away by any enthusiasm for liberty as an unbodied idea, but rejoiced in the liberties which the Constitution steadily secured to a continent; and, no doubt, felt that the law of right commanded him to defend and perpetuate that charter, in the hope that the evils it sheltered would die out in time, while its good would widen and be everlasting.

The prophetic men, who stand above all systems in immediate communion with eternal

truth and justice, command the deepest gratitude and worship of after-times. But God has a use for these Herculean heroes of society. And among the crowds of legislators who have no larger vision than sectional and partisan passions disclose, and the swarms of politicians that act only with reference to self, let us gratefully confess the eminence of this man, on whose brain were stamped the features of an empire, whose imagination personified a government, and who felt that he spoke and voted for the interests of millions and the hopes of posterity.

Mr. Webster was a statesman. His greatness did not consist in a capacity of concentrating and leading the passions of large bodies of people. Clay and Chatham were eminent for this power. But he was a philosophical statesman. He had a clear and vigorous comprehension of truth in the domain of public affairs. When he succeeded, it was by the force of his statement in the senate or the cabinet; and his power over the people resulted from the majesty with which he robed

the truth, by his argument and utterance, and by the dominion which he made it exercise over their reason and heart. His ample mind was a spiritual state-house or capitol, rich with the annals of constitutional history, filled with the stately lore of national and civil law, studded with apartments that were crowded with records of diplomatic wisdom, freighted with the principles and statistics of public economy. His eye was constructed to see the truth and proprieties of national relations. He knew the coasts, the shoals, and the soundings of the ocean of national experience; and his arm had the vigor to grasp and guide the helm of a state. His eloquence, too, had the serious and self-assured strength that made it competent to the utterance of a nation's thought and purpose. It was fit in language and manner for a congress of kings. Even in his simplest passages, the power of a great personality was manifest. His common sense was ponderous and sublime, by the momentum which his arm gave it, and the dignity which his diction imparted to it. Within the limits of his ge-

nius, his powers were unsounded. No triumph that he ever won seemed to require the whole of his resources, or to drain the hiding-places of his strength. The movement of his mind was like the sluggish might of the sea. His genius has thrown up into literature the most brilliant spray of rhetoric and imagination; but its natural manifestation was the majestic ground-swell of a resistless, undeveloped, unfathomable power.

Other elements and indications of his wonderful greatness would arrest our notice, in any thing like a full treatment of the theme, — the truthfulness of nature and sincerity of spirit which hindered even his reason from being a powerful advocate in a bad cause; the dignity of his speech and bearing in all public scenes, and the strenuous influence of his example against the vulgar degradations of congressional debate; the strong moral and religious reverence that pervaded his public words; the fast fidelity to his friends; and the tenderness which made the majesty of his presence sweet and cheering in his home.

But we cannot critically measure the outline and bulk of his nature, standing so near his new-made grave. In what I have thus far said, I have kept you too long from the grateful and practical religious lessons that are unveiled by such a life and such a death.

The great Teacher has said, "He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant." We are called on now devoutly to recognize the beneficent ordering of Providence, that makes all true wisdom and greatness generous, and compels it to be a public advantage. Selfishness is in the heart of the world; but the best portion of the power of pre-eminent genius is saved, by a law of Providence, from the control of selfishness, even if that temper is in the heart of the possessor. The thoughts of a large reason, the creations of a rich imagination, the heroic activity of a great patriotism, are for the people, for mankind, for all time. What gratitude is due from us to Heaven that it is so! A mind like Bacon's burns with the passion for truth, and braces up its brain to the strenuous search and

careful demonstration of new principles that rule the domain of science. But he cannot keep those principles for his exclusive use. He cannot put a price upon them, and say, "I will sell them only to the rich, only to feed my purse and my pride." The moment he proves and utters them in his intellectual joy, the air bears them on its wings, and makes them universal. It turns out that the toils and victories of that intellect in its library were for the benefit of humbler men, for the advancement of knowledge and the improvement of civilization. In his desire to satisfy the thirst of his own intellect, Bacon harnessed himself to the whole fabric of society, and strained his sinews to start the world on the path of progress. The greatest of all, he was the servant of all.

So, too, Shakespeare cannot patent his creations, and say, "Those only shall enjoy the fruits of my genius who will pay my price for the great luxury." The all-merciful God will not suffer that, but admits the poor to enjoy them, and scatters the leaves that bear

them into almost every home. Newton does not think of the sailor, or the interests of navigation, when he toils till he lifts the moon by the muscles of his logic and weighs it, and proves on what pillars of law the sky-roof is upheld; but he is the intellectual attorney of future ages and the human race, in all those wearisome labors to unlock the hieroglyphic cipher of celestial law; and the pay he gets is gratitude, and a name printed in star-type on the firmament. The patriot, when he resolves to resist oppression, and peril his life rather than bear the finger-weight of tyranny upon his soul, lifts up the heavy mesh that holds a people in its toils, in his struggles to free himself, and so becomes the saviour of a land.

Every magnificent brain scatters light like the sun. The ample intellect that has just been withdrawn from us, illustrated, in its way, the beneficence of God. The nation is bereaved; the people mourn; for the nation has lost a great servant, the people a majestic friend. God gave him a glorious mind, fit to

do national service; and it is compelled to do that service. Whatever interests or desires might draw him towards a strictly professional or private life, he cannot stay there. He rises, by the natural upsoaring of his powers, to the Capitol. The whole land has the benefit of his private discipline, his thought, his speech. Countless farms, workshops, counting-rooms, and homes, that have the deepest interest in peace, have the benefit of his insight, his knowledge of public law, and his cool, just temper, to save them and civilization from the detriment of war with our mother-land. The Greeks, struggling for liberty, catch the inspiration of his eloquence, which strengthens the public opinion of the world in their behalf. His fellows, that need justice, have the aid of his understanding and his lips in the solemn precincts of the temple of law. The whole North has the advantage of his mature powers to silence the malice and the taunts of southern envy. Public order, that has been shocked by a barbarous midnight murder, has the aid of his arm to tear the accomplices of an assassin

from the subtle technicalities that seem to hide them from the reach of justice, and drag them to their doom. And the moral sense of humanity possesses his frame, and breaks out through his lips, to impeach the Czar for his cruelty to Hungary, and arraign him for trial at the bar of the civilized world.

His work is a public one. With a hero's strength he must do the hero's labor. The ambition which he felt, the desire to stand eminent in the world's history that was in his heart, the noble emulation that stirred him, were the intellectual thongs and traces by which Providence kept him fastened to the great public burdens which it required his strength to draw.

There is nothing in public life to attract the eyes and the heart of one that would taste the purest and constant pleasures of life. How much did the great statesman enjoy of that privacy, those relaxations, the satisfactions of those agricultural pursuits, the affections and repose of home, which most attracted his heart? How slight the opportunities

granted to him to retreat from the national arena, and taste the happiness of life!

> "He who ascends to mountain-tops shall find
> The loftiest peaks most wrapped in clouds and snow;
> He who surpasses or subdues mankind
> Must look down on the hate of those below.
> Though high *above* the sun of glory glow,
> And far *beneath* the earth and ocean spread,
> *Round* him are icy rocks, and loudly blow
> Contending tempests on his naked head,
> And thus reward the toils which to those summits led."

The tax is so severe upon political greatness that no man would pay it, — the world would be deprived of the benefit of such greatness, if the Almighty had not provided that it cannot escape the toils by which its service may accrue to the human race. On the score of pleasure, the powerful servant of the country, whom we mourn, would not have looked a moment upon all the pecuniary recompense he gained for his devotion to public life; but fortunately there were providential motives constantly weighing down the yearnings of the heart, and keeping him pledged to the service of society.

And then think of the detractions and slanders, the open defamation and insult, which

public character must bear from partisan hostility and malice. What but the order of God, demanding great service from great talents, could keep a man in public life against this terrible warning, — the certainty of the shower of arrows, many of them poisoned arrows, against which he must stand?

> "The secret enemy, whose sleepless eye
> Stands sentinel, accuser, judge, and spy;
> The foe, the fool, the jealous, and the vain;
> The envious, who but breathe in other's pain;
> Behold the host! delighting to deprave,
> Who track the steps of Glory to the grave,
> Watch every fault that daring Genius owes
> Half to the ardor which its birth bestows,
> Distort the truth, accumulate the lie,
> And pile the Pyramid of Calumny!"

With what fearful accuracy does this describe what the eminent man we deplore was compelled to endure! The foulest ink has been cast at him in his latter years. And so much of it by reformers too, — men that stood forth as the patrons of virtue, humanity, and the sacred law of God! We all know the chief and the sad occasion for most of these attacks. We know how many good men were forced to withdraw their sympathies from the great states-

man by his speech and course towards the close of his senatorial career. But is the warfare of a pirate upon a prominent man's motives the natural expression of virtuous dissent? Is it essential that a reformer in opposition shall be the assassin of character? Is it necessary that all dignity of temper and charity of criticism shall die out of the nature that holds an advance-idea, and that the cause of humanity must be defended in the disposition of a fiend? We are gathered in a church dedicated to God; and his law is supreme over the highest genius, as over the humblest man. Let us not hesitate to say, that, if at the time I allude to, the great man, now gone, did bow his magnificent brain unworthily to the Slave-power, which he had always opposed, from the dictate of a personal ambition, forgetting the awful trusts of genius and the service it owes to humanity, he fell; and his intellectual greatness only darkens his degradation. But who has demonstrated this hypothesis? Who has looked into that large heart, and found such black treason there? What if he

did feel *all* the trusts of senatorial office and intellectual power; if he felt that the preservation of his country from the imminent danger of disruption was the comprehensive duty of a statesman, and the best permanent legacy to all races in our borders? I prefer to believe this theory. It accords with the principles that always governed him. Then his action was conscientious and heroic; and, although it may fail to commend itself to the conscience and wisdom of many, although they find it impossible as Christians to obey the statute which he defended, let them remember, in justice to him, that he was placed in the Capitol to act, not from their light, but from his own. Let the passions of politics be silent, let the heats of hatred cool, at his grave. He went with religious calmness to meet Him who judges with blended charity and justice. And as we bow before the mystery of the vast Providence, let us unite in adoration of his ordinance, that the most gifted of his creatures shall be the servants of all.

The allusion just made to the religious

majesty and calmness of Mr. Webster's death suggests the second point which the contemplation of his career should impress upon us, — the strength and support which religion derives from the convictions and loyalty of such an intellect. I put out of the question here every thing that concerns loyalty of life and religiousness of character. It is not our province to search for and put together the proofs or the disproofs of that. But it cannot be denied that we have buried a great man, whose heart was alive with religious feeling, and whose mind was reverent in its recognition of religious truth. If proof is needed to establish the chief ideas of religion, — the existence of God, the supremacy of moral principles, and a future life, — we may turn for it, with equal confidence, to the mystic intimations of nature, or to the faith and the convictions which the greatest men of the world have cherished and expressed. The pre-eminent men of the world have not been atheists or doubters, but reverent believers and worshippers. Where, O atheist! where, O scoffer! will you point us to

the large-limbed nature, the encyclopedic soul, that dignifies your miserable creed? Some slender, cold-hearted, third-rate, or perhaps second-rate man, here and there in history, has babbled some skeptical folly, or darkened his name by the shadow of atheistic thought; but, when we look up to the first rank of genius, — to Socrates and Plato and Pythagoras, to Paul and Luther, to Bacon and Leibnitz and Newton, — we find they are men who bow before the infinite sanctities which their souls discern.

You have heard of the great reflecting telescope, built by a nobleman of Great Britain, whose tube, by the aid of ponderous machinery, is pointed towards the night-sky. What if it threw doubt upon the reports which our eyesight and ordinary glasses make concerning the glories of the sky? What if it scattered the stars into mist, made Sirius nothing but a huge heap of fog, and banished all our associations of grandeur and glorious law that have been connected with the heavens? But it confirms all the visions of the ordinary in-

struments that search the upper space; and, besides that, it breaks up the misty light of the nebulæ into sand-heaps of suns, and reports firmaments, far in the depths above us, which other lenses cannot reach. Thus the greatest souls of the race confirm the views and faith of ordinary minds; reflect more of the glories of God; disclose, by their more searching vision, fresh galaxies of mystery; and make our thoughts of the Providence that embraces us, and comprehends all things, more reverent and profound.

What a shock it would give the world's order, if such minds as Mr. Webster's saw no proofs of the divine existence, felt the strain of no law of duty, thrilled with no emotions of worship, but found the thoughts of their own genius sufficient company for their loneliness; lifting their proud and flinty summits above the superstitions that shade the valleys of human nature, into a bleak, atheistic air! It is not so. Religion is commended with the more earnestness to men by their consciousness of its truth. There was a fitting

commentary on the glorious eighth Psalm of David, when our statesman stood under the elm, at night, on his estate in Marshfield, and, lifting his solemn eyes to the light that blazed on the firmament, said, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars which thou hast ordained, Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?" That is the soul's astronomy. Oversweeping the skeptical chatter of irreverent mathematicians, there was an echo of the truth that sprang, ages ago, out of a great Hebrew heart. Jura answered to the voice of the Alps.

We do not mean to say, or to hint, that a taste for the literature and elegance of the Scriptures is a saving grace of character; but we have a right to rejoice in all the unprofessional veneration which is offered to the sacred writings. It is well for the world to have eminent witnesses, that it is not an interested and a clerical taste alone that bows to the sublimity of the great book. Is it not proof of the majesty of Job and Isaiah and

Habbakuk, that they were the chosen teachers of such a mind; that he retreated from care and sorrow into their society, and was strengthened and softened by their lofty and mystic speech? It is sufficient testimony to the greatness of these biblical geniuses, that the largest natures seek inspiration from them: it is equal proof of the loftiness of an intellect, that it rises into near acquaintance with these eminent souls. What if a great man does not always live in harmony with the truth he venerates? What if the stern characters he invites to his library sometimes rebuke him with their prophetic austerity, and the truths spoken from the sacred mount, to which he lifts adoring eyes, flash warning upon his infidelity? Is not this a still more impressive revelation of their supremacy? and does not the great man's reverence, which their occasional denunciation does not impair, point to their royalty over conscience, which we should hasten practically to confess?

We have a right, therefore, to ask, Is the Bible, which such men as Mr. Webster and

President Adams revered and made a constant study, a shallow book? Is the Christian faith which such men as they adored as the supreme truth, and the only regenerative power of the world, a secondary matter? Are the religious relations of the soul, which such men affirmed were of first importance, and which no levity of their speech, at least, ever slighted, matters which we may safely disregard? The answer we shall be forced to give these questions makes the most solemn truth practical, and sheds a searching ray into our hearts. The supreme benefaction to humanity of such an intellect as we have lost is the testimony it bears to the reality and the necessity of religion. Now that he is gone, in the momentary gloom of his departure, I know not but these words stand out the most luminous of all the great words he uttered, — these words so simple but sublime: "Religion is necessary and indispensable in any great human character. There is no living without it. Religion is the tie which connects man with his Creator, and holds him to his throne. If that tie be

all sundered, all broken, he floats away, a worthless atom in the universe; its proper attractions all gone, its destiny thwarted, and its whole future nothing but darkness, desolation, and death. A man with no sense of religious duty is he whom the Scriptures describe in such terse but terrific language as living 'without God in the world.' Such a man is out of his proper being, out of the circle of all his duties, out of the circle of all his happiness, and away, far, far away, from the purposes of his creation."

It is worthy of remark in this connection, that so comprehensive and reverent a student of the Scriptures as Mr. Webster was not the partisan of any intricate and narrow theological theories. The broad, plain, primary truths of religion were sufficient for his reverence and his conscience. I have heard it said that he disliked the word "Christianity," and preferred the simple phrase, "the religion of Jesus." The spirit of penitence, faith, and love, and a reverential gratitude for the mission of Christ as the channel of redeeming

truth and life to the world, — these were the outlines of his theology; these were the definitions of Christian character which satisfied his mind. The report which a friend has made of his last hours assures the world, that there was nothing in his utterances of faith and hope "of a technical character. No expression escaped him which would mark him as of this or that theology, or of any church save the universal church of Christ." Thus his life and death give us an original illustration of the difference between theology and religion. What the smallest satellite of our system needs is the controlling force of the sun, and its bounteous heat and light; and the majestic Jupiter, as he ploughs his grand orbit, needs no more. Whatever system of astronomy be true, the regal planet requires nothing more than the check and the charity of the central orb, and the smallest asteroid receives no less. So the feeblest and the mightiest minds require alike the central and simple forces of religion, and find their strength, not in artful theologies, but in the common and generous light and

influence from God that fall equally upon all.

And without the solemn light of religion around it, and the great background of religious truth to relieve it, how utterly must the last hours of Mr. Webster have lost the majesty which was upon them! If he had died simply a worn-out and disappointed man, looking with sadness at the blighted hopes of the earth, and lifting no thought to scenes beyond, how sad the last days would have seemed, — the wreck of a noble and weather-stained bark upon the rocks of death! But now, what a grandeur in the close of his career! The deepening feeling that he was floating out beyond the reckonings of earth and the outline of human charts; the calm fulfilment of every duty, and the reining up of every faculty to obey the mastery of the will; the solemn tones of prayer, laden with the riches of his language and humble with penitence; the majestic and tender farewell to family and friends; and then, after the broken ejaculations of the psalm for the divine rod and staff, the silent

close! — not a wreck on the desolate coasts of mortality, but the fading of a noble ship into the mists that curtain the horizon, its sails all set, bearing one great and serene form beyond our gaze into the everlasting light! The spirit of such grandeur there should be in every death. Are we prepared thus to gather our robes about us; thus to look up to Heaven for help; thus to express our confidence in the truth of the Bible and the divine mission of Christ; thus to feel the support of the rod and the staff which the feeblest need, and which does not bend under the weight of the mightiest arm?

I must ask you to bear with me while I refer to one more impressive lesson of such a life and death: I mean the solemn truth of immortality. When the news of such a loss breaks upon society, the first feeling is that of the mystery of death itself. It is as though we had never before realized it. And then it opens anew the problem of eternal life. It seems as if the departure of such a spirit must break the monotonous silence, — must open

for the moment some rift in the cloud, and let in a beam from the all-surrounding day. We ought to reflect upon this death, in regard to that question of immortality. If such a faith is not a fixed habit of our mind, we ought to pause, and set the vastness of his powers in our thought, and seriously ask the question, "What has become of them? whither are they gone?" This life cannot be what it ought to be, — man cannot be what he ought to be, — duty cannot be as sacred as it should be, unless we have convictions, settled as those which Christ had and which he would inspire, of the everlasting duration of our souls. And now is the time for us to think on that point. God calls on us to meditate. When he removes from the earth such men as Washington and Webster, his providence puts the question to every unsettled mind, "Do you believe that they are annihilated, swallowed up by the dark?" There is not a particle less to-day of the substance that made up the noble frame of Washington, than there was when he dignified the capital. Ages hence, the matter

that clothed his spirit will still exist, unwasted by a grain. And does the mind, the virtue, the character, die, while not a hair of his bodily substance is suffered to slip out of the treasury of matter? Of that great brow which was laid recently in the sepulchre, not a particle will ever drop from the grasp of physical law. It may moulder, but it cannot be destroyed. And do you believe that the reason of which it was the fortress, and from which it played the lightnings of argument and eloquence, will be less permanent? Does God think more of such a brain than of the understanding that made its arch sublime? Was that soul an ephemeral thing of threescore years and ten, while the body is beyond the possibility of destruction? It must be a darkened mind that can believe that, — a mind not quickened with a proper sense of God. Death is visibly defeated, to the eye of every reflective mind, when it drags into its darkness such a nature as that. The prey is too great. His hunger is not suffered to appease itself, even on the matter which the spirit inhabited; and

we know that the soul cannot slip into his jaws. Over the mystery of that tomb near which the ocean moans, we may hear the chant of nature, according with that of revelation, — "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?"

This is no mere speculative question, but the most practical of all questions. For, if we answer the question of immortality aright for this man, we answer it for all men. If we feel that it is proved by his genius, then we lift the whole race, with which he was kindred, into the light and the responsibilities of an infinite existence. Then human life is not a mean thing, not a trivial thing, but a solemn grant, a moral trust. Then we are all living with the eye of God upon us, and an eternal future before us, the conditions of whose fortunes our own habits are deciding now; and it behooves each of us to ask ourselves before the tomb that has just opened, "In what spirit am I working? Is it one I am willing to carry into the light of eternity, and submit to the scrutiny of God?"

A friend said, when the news of the great death reached us, that it seemed to him as though such a brain should have had two bodies to wear out. I believe that the limits of its earthly frame were not the limits of its existence. I should believe, on evidence independent of revelation, that there are mysteries in the universe for such a mind to revere eternally; great studies to engage its interest; profounder laws than were opened here for it to grasp; divine splendors to kindle deeper faculties than were here developed. If there were heroic virtues which were not appreciated or rewarded fully in his mortal career, I believe that he is gone into a state where the recompense is not affected by human injustice. If there were great errors and violation of trusts committed here, I believe that he has gone into the dominion of a justice that executes searching and righteous judgment on every soul, in view of the spirit's final welfare. And so, let us lift our thoughts from that grave to God and eternity. Let us be grateful to the Providence that sends great genius to us, and

bids it work in our service; that reveals truths to us which the mightiest minds adore with the humility of children; and that intimates, through the death of such, the great destiny and privilege of every soul. In the light of that Providence and that eternity, let us pray that we may be faithful; let us resolve to redeem our time.

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